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Report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund on the work of its first regular session of 2004

(19-23 and 26 January 2004)*

Addendum**

* The present document is an advance version of the report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund on its first regular session (19-23 and 26 January 2004). The reports on the annual session (7-11 June 2004) and the second regular session (13-17 September 2004) will be issued as parts II and III, respectively. These reports will be issued in final form as *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2004, Supplement No. 14* (E/2004/34/Rev.1-E/ICEF/2004/7/Rev.1).

** Submission of this report was delayed by consultations with the secretariat of the World Food Programme, which had overall responsibility for coordinating the preparation of the report.

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1. The present report, submitted as an addendum to the report of the UNICEF Executive Board on its first regular session of 2004, is a summary of the discussions that took place during the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme (WFP), held on 23 and 26 January 2004. The text was prepared by the secretariats of the funds and programmes and approved by the Presidents of the three Executive Boards.

I. HIV/AIDS: regional initiatives

2. Following preliminary comments by the President of the UNICEF Executive Board, the Executive Director of UNFPA summarized global regional initiatives to fight HIV/AIDS. Next, representatives of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) briefed the joint meeting on efforts to fight the pandemic in eastern and southern Africa, emphasizing links among HIV/AIDS, nutrition and governance.

3. Delegations agreed that HIV/AIDS was a growing threat urgently requiring greater attention, action and funds. Coordinated action and results-monitoring were needed among the United Nations organizations, with the roles of each clearly defined. One speaker suggested that UNAIDS be the main coordinator at country level. Several speakers requested that more information on coordinated United Nations efforts be provided at future joint meetings of the Boards. Delegations also called for stronger linkages among United Nations organizations and other groups.

4. Several delegations voiced concern over the danger of the dispersal of resources due to the wide diversity of donors and programmes. To harness resources effectively, it was suggested that every country implement "three ones": one national AIDS strategy, one national AIDS commission and one way to monitor and report progress. Greater joint funding was also proposed.

5. The panel acknowledged the danger of resources dispersal, which can be addressed through the "three ones". As for results, the common country assessment (CCA) acted as a joint gauge. The bulk of funds and resources were given to Governments, which should be helped to channel them effectively. On all fronts, more accountability was needed.

6. In response to suggestions that each country's HIV/AIDS strategy should be incorporated into development planning and the poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) process, the panel said that the PRSP process was a cornerstone of national HIV/AIDS efforts, along with sector-wide approaches and nationally-driven coordinating mechanisms.

7. Many delegations emphasized the interconnection among HIV/AIDS, poverty, food insecurity and governance issues. One delegation asked for a report at a future joint Board meeting on coordinated support for food security, specifically cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The panel replied that attention to interconnected issues was growing; that multi-partner efforts were promoting agriculture through conservation farming and other methods; and that FAO played an important role in nutrition, food security, orphan care and other areas.

8. Delegations said that an effective response to HIV/AIDS also involved taking actions to: build local capacity; empower girls and women; promote the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV; support public health initiatives and increase access to social services; balance prevention, treatment and care; reduce the price of drugs and increase their availability; build a continuum of humanitarian assistance to development; secure more stable and predictable funding; enlist greater support of the private sector; and intensify scaling-up.

9. In closing the discussion, the President of the UNICEF Executive Board requested that presentations and responses at next year's joint meeting of the Boards better reflect coordinated action and mechanisms.

II. Simplification and harmonization

10. The WFP Deputy Executive Director summarized progress in the area of simplification and harmonization on behalf of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP. The 2003 Chairs of the Programme and Management Groups briefed on the Joint Programming Guidance Note and its links to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) results matrix, followed by the Niger Resident Coordinator, a.i., who described country-level experiences in preparing the results matrix, identifying opportunities for joint programming.

11. The meeting reaffirmed the importance of the simplification and harmonization agenda for stakeholders in development. Fundamentally, it was about doing business more effectively and efficiently. The United Nations' work was part of a broader agenda agreed by the international community in Rome in early 2003, and it would form part of the forthcoming discussions on the triennial comprehensive policy review (TCPR). The meeting agreed that the developments reported in June 2003 and on this occasion demonstrated the importance of the subject in relation to such cross-cutting issues as food security and HIV/AIDS, and its complexity. Simplification and harmonization included such issues as financing modalities, common houses and services, leadership by resident coordinators (RCs) and whether human resources management provided adequate incentives to collaborate.

12. The meeting was impressed by progress, but impatient for further results. It recognized that the questions posed by the work were difficult and in some cases threatening. There was a need to improve contacts with agencies working on humanitarian issues and to consider the implications for the specialized agencies. The meeting wanted to see imaginative thinking about the broad simplification and harmonization agenda in the near future and to be involved in it, for example through brainstorming sessions.

13. The President of the WFP Executive Board presented an informal paper on the role of the annual joint meeting, responding to governance questions raised at the 2003 joint meeting. Two questions were posed: whether to make the joint meeting a decision-making body, or to continue with the existing mandate and aim to improve its usefulness. There was broad support for the suggestions in the paper for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the joint meeting under its existing mandate. These would be pursued by the Presidents of the three Boards, who would meet after the session to plan the next joint meeting. Opinions varied regarding the more radical option of investing the joint meeting with decision-making authority: some delegations regarded it as a logical step in the evolution of governance; others did not think it would add value to the existing machinery. It was noted that the question was already under review, as paragraph 28 of Economic and Social Council resolution 2003/3 of 11 July 2003 on the TCPR requested "a report on the assessment of the value-added of the joint meetings of the Executive Boards and their impact on the operational activities segment of the Economic and Social Council and ... recommendations as appropriate". The joint meeting looked forward to an early issues and options paper for informal discussion with the membership, preferably in March 2004.

III. The resident coordinator system

The resident coordinator assessment centre

14. Opening remarks by the President of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board preceded an introduction to the assessment centre by the Director of the United Nations Development Group Office (UNDGO). Two resident coordinators who had undergone the new assessment process described their experiences.

15. Delegations questioned the appropriateness of self-selection for the assessment, particularly in comparing the old and new systems. They wanted candidates for resident representative (RR)/RC positions to be drawn from the widest possible field and queried the adequacy of the applicant pool, noting the need for gender balance, coaching and learning plans. They asked about developing-country representation and the pre-selection and progress measurement systems. They said that special representatives of the Secretary-General working alongside RCs should undergo similar assessment.

16. Speakers asked if the increasing complexity of the roles of the RRs/RC's and security coordinators was consistent with simplification and harmonization, and whether the assessment process drained time and funds from substantive work.

17. The panel clarified that all future candidates would undergo the assessment, focusing on competencies and substance. The process – described by those who had experienced it as unbiased and geographically and gender-balanced – lasted three days. Nominating agencies covered the cost, ensuring nomination of only the ablest candidates.

18. The UNDGO Director described the new procedure for identifying and training candidates at an early stage, adding that the various surveys used in the past facilitated comparison between old and new assessments. She added that the company conducting the assessment employed staff from a wide variety of backgrounds and countries.

Video link with Lesotho country team

19. In a video conference, the Lesotho country team, introduced by the Lesotho RR/RC, explained how the RC system in Lesotho supported the CCA, UNDAF and PRSP processes, and their alignment with the Millennium Development Goals.

20. Speakers agreed that progress made in the RR/RC system was yielding tangible results, although resources destined for Lesotho had dwindled even for HIV/AIDS programmes, making 'scaling up' impossible. Some suggested that work towards a stronger system could be funded by the United Nations as a whole or by individual countries. They emphasized that an RR/RC needed a balance of personal qualities and substantive knowledge. It was stressed that in crisis and post-crisis situations, United Nations organizations must work in coordination, not in competition with each other.

Closing remarks by the UNDP Administrator

21. The Administrator stated that in future, RC/RRs would contribute to the evaluations of country team members, with the support of their regional directors. He noted the need for additional RC/RR candidates with humanitarian backgrounds. He acknowledged delegations' funding suggestions, mentioned the new trust fund for support to the RC system, and indicated that core resources were increasing. The United Nations country presence should be adequate and relevant rather than large and fragmented and the United Nations organizations must work in close, constant collaboration with donor and programme Governments in order to remain relevant.

IV. Security

22. Following opening remarks by the President of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board, the Executive Director of UNICEF, representing UNDP, UNFPA, WFP and UNICEF, briefed delegations on United Nations staff safety and security.

23. Delegations encouraged intensification of efforts at all levels to ensure staff safety and security, including strengthening local support to United Nations missions, ensuring investigations of attacks, and punitive measures against perpetrators of crimes. The role of host Governments in bringing to justice those responsible for attacks/threats was underscored. Delegations inquired if the lack of cooperation from host Governments resulted from lack of capacity or lack of commitment. They asked about measures being undertaken to restore confidence in the United Nations. Delegations were interested in knowing how to ensure cooperation between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations organizations.

24. Delegations inquired if security costs were covered by the regular budget of the United Nations and if recurring security costs impacted development assistance delivery costs. Noting that security costs should not overburden regular resources, speakers asked what funds were allocated by United Nations funds and

programmes for security. Delegations asked about the criteria used to classify countries as high or low risk and inquired if security measures were different in those countries. One delegation asked about the recommendation concerning United Nations common premises.

25. Delegations underscored that concrete and visible results at the country level could be a source of local security. The need for information gathering and reliable threat analysis were underscored. Some delegations noted with approbation the formation of a committee by the United Nations to investigate the terrorist bombings in Baghdad, and stressed the importance of doing the same whenever United Nations personnel were subjected to similar treatment.

26. In response, the UNICEF Executive Director concurred that the United Nations needed to regain the humanitarian "space" within which a degree of security was ensured because United Nations staff were recognized as neutral and impartial providers of humanitarian support and development assistance. She agreed that cooperation with NGOs was essential. Regarding the budget for security, she noted that in 2002-2003 the budget for the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD) was $53 million, with about $12 million of it coming from the regular budget and the remainder from other agencies' budgets. For the 2004-2005 biennium, the budget was $86 million, of which $15 million was from the regular budget. She stated that there were both one-time and recurring costs associated with security. Concerning common premises, she clarified that there was no change in policy, the recommendation being that they be looked at on a case-by-case basis in terms of security requirements.

27. She noted that UNSECOORD had primary responsibility for determining the security phase in a given country. A representative of UNSECOORD added that at the country level, the designated official and his/her team determined the security phase based on a risk/threat analysis. Furthermore, security phases 3, 4 and 5 could be declared only with the approval of the Secretary-General.